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HONORING THE ST. LOUIS GATEWAY CLASSIC SPORTS FOUNDATION

HON. WM. LACY CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 21, 2003

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the St. Louis Gateway Classic Sports Foundation for its commitment to providing academically average youth in St. Louis with the opportunity to attain a valuable college education. Since 1998, the St. Louis Gateway Classic Sports Foundation has striven to even the educational playing field by giving generously to hard-working students.

The Foundation is sending a clear, unmistakable message to urban youth that someone does care about them by believing in them and financially supporting their goals of attaining a valuable college degree.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great privilege that I recognize the St. Louis Gateway Classic Sports Foundation today before Congress. The Foundation was recently honored in an article published in the Baltimore Sun. I would like to share this article with my colleagues which further details its dedication to providing a vital contribution to our youth by helping to produce an educated society.

[From the Baltimore Sun, Nov. 9, 2003]

BLACK SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM HELPS "PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE"; MO. FOUNDATION REWARDS THE ACADEMICALLY AVERAGE

(By Mike Bowler)

Don't even dare dream about college, a guidance counselor warned Leonard Woodson. With your mediocre academic record, you'll be lucky to survive high school.

The counselor was wrong. It took Woodson an extra semester, but next month he'll graduate from Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo., with a B average—and no college debt. All his costs were covered by a St. Louis foundation that rewards academically average students in financial need.

"It took me two hours to do what my fellow students could do in an hour, but I learned to survive in the world," says Woodson, 22. Unable to keep up taking notes, he recorded lectures and played them back in his dorm room.

Woodson is one of about 50 graduates of St. Louis-area high schools who have received full scholarships to historically black colleges and universities since 1998. The foundation raises the money, in part, by sponsoring an annual football "classic" between black college teams, devoting the proceeds to scholarships and other charities.

"Average kids don't get a chance because everybody gives to the cream of the crop," says Earl Wilson Jr., a retired IBM executive who established the foundation a decade ago. "It's our way of giving back to the community."

Wilson, 71, began his IBM career as one of the company's first black salesmen. He says he understands students in the middle. "Myself and many of my colleagues were average students or worse," he says. "People at the extremes get help. People in the middle don't."

Lawrence A. Davis Jr., chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, whose Golden Lions play in the annual fall classic,

agrees. "The world is run by average people," he says. "We reward people who can run fast, jump high and throw balls through holes. The least we can do is help those who might not be academic stars but who are willing to work hard."

"It's the trickle-up theory," says Sylvester Brown Jr., a columnist for the St. Louis PostDispatch. Brown defends Wilson against charges from another St. Louis writer that he's "creating dumbness" by so generously supporting less-than-stellar scholars.

"I'd much rather see Earl spend \$10,000 on one scholarship than give \$1,000 scholarships to 10 students," says Brown. "What he's saying by doing it this way is that we have enough faith in you to support you for four years. You have no financial worries. All you have to do is focus on being great."

The foundation distributes application forms to high school guidance counselors, and uses radio and print advertising to get the word out. Winners are chosen by a committee of educators and others who review the applications and interview applicants. "I stay completely out of the selection process," says Wilson. Sixteen recipients are currently attending college through the program.

Since the foundation began giving scholarships 5 years ago, the champion recipient is Dedree Smart, 23, who went to Howard University in Washington. "I have been so blessed," she says. "There's no way I could have afforded Howard. I didn't have to worry about anything financially, so I could concentrate on my grades. I went from a low B average in high school to graduating magna cum laude."

Smart earned her degree last year and is back in Missouri, working as special events coordinator for the State's public university system. "I am so elated, so grateful and so proud of my baby," says her mother, Delores Smart.

Wilson says the foundation carefully monitors the scholarship program. "The ones who finish college almost always get better grades" than they did in high school, he says.

"These are the late bloomers," says Irving Clay, 78, a former city alderman who sits on the foundation's board. "I and Earl, we grew up in tenements about 10 blocks from here. We all know what it's like to struggle. We know late bloomers."

But the scholarship program has had its failures and setbacks. About 40 percent of recipients have washed out, and since Smart's graduation, the foundation has dropped Howard and Virginia's Hampton University because of their high, private-college tuition.

Then, too, some scholarship recipients "haven't so much as said thank you," Wilson says. "That's a real disappointment." He expects them to send him an invitation when they graduate, and he wants all recipients—and their parents—to sell tickets to the annual classic.

In addition to the football game, which Wilson estimates has generated \$3.5 million in 10 years, the foundation raises money through charity golf and high school basketball events. Last year, it opened a \$2.8 million sports complex near downtown St. Louis that includes a computer laboratory for after-school tutoring and a "Walk of Fame" featuring prominent local African-Americans.

About 20 percent of foundation revenue comes from corporate sponsors such as Anheuser-Busch Inc., whose brand name Budweiser is attached to the football game.

"We raise 80 percent ourselves," Wilson says. "That's extremely high for a foundation like this. We are all about self-help. We don't want anyone interfering with our independence."

That attitude has rankled some in the St. Louis business community, says Brown, the newspaper columnist.

"Earl doesn't go begging in the business community, and that rubs some people the wrong way. He says [racial] integration is a wonderful thing, but we have to take care of our own. That's his integrity. Every year, he beats his head against the wall trying to fill the [Edward Jones] dome, every year he doesn't do it, and every year he smiles and says we'll do it next year."

St. Louis' only historically black institution, Harris-Stowe State College, doesn't have a football program, so the Gateway Classic turns to regional schools for the annual competition. In recent years, Arkansas-Pine Bluff, about seven hours away by car, has become a permanent contestant, its opponents rotating among Kentucky State University and others. The Classic weekend features band competitions, street parties and lunches with African-American sports figures.

"It's all generated by Earl," says Julius Dix, 74, a retired St. Louis school administrator who sits on the selection committee. "He's a born salesman. He could sell you anything."

Davis, the UAPB chancellor, says the annual event is "really great for our university. We bring in hundreds for the game. It's great visibility for us and our students. It's like a second homecoming."

Several Gateway scholarship students have enrolled at Pine Bluff, including two with the title Miss Gateway Classic. These are young women who prevail in a pageant after their junior year in high school and preside as Miss Gateway Classic as seniors, making appearances around St. Louis at foundation-sponsored events.

The pageant is partly a beauty contest [with evening gowns but not bathing suits] and partly a contest of brains and poise, says Janell Wallace, the 2002 winner, who is attending Pine Bluff on a \$40,000 Gateway Classic scholarship.

"I had to write an essay and answer questions on current events. I had to learn etiquette and how to walk and speak publicly and keep calm. That's helped a lot here," she says.

For Wallace, 18, who had never been away from St. Louis for more than two weeks, college has been "awesome and at times scary," she says. "Everything seems a lot bigger. Even the bugs are bigger. I never killed bugs; that's what you have a daddy for."

But classes at UAPB are smaller, she says, than they were at Hazelwood Central High. In the first couple of months of school she has become active in student government. She plays softball, and she has joined the modeling squad, a group that puts on fashion shows.

"There were a couple of times I wanted to give up and go home," she says. "But I'm beginning to feel complete now. I never felt that way in high school."

THANKS DIANA "TOODLES" HAUF

HON. JOHN T. DOOLITTLE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 21, 2003

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Speaker, today my colleagues Mr. POMBO, Mr. OSE, and Mr. MATSUI and I wish to express warm thanks, congratulations, and best wishes to Diana "Toodles" Hauf upon her retirement as Executive Services Director and Concierge for United Airlines, at the Sacramento International Airport. With an always helpful and